

Coordinate and Enhance Distance Learning for Montana Community Colleges

Biennium cost: \$270,000
 FY 2008: \$135,000
 FY 2009: \$135,000

Montana's three community colleges provide long-term training solutions and educational programs for remotely located Montana residents who need access to educational opportunities. The community colleges, in partnership with the Montana University System, seek to enhance distance learning and provide students optimal opportunities for distance education. The Montana Community College project addresses the unique needs of community college students engaged in distance learning.

The purpose of this proposal is to collaborate with the Montana University System to establish and promote the MUS gateway for distance learning in Montana. These funds will enable the community colleges to address the needs of Montana resident students engaged in distance learning and to ensure every student's success. Developing on-line support and student advising systems, together with online financial aid processes and central course management is imperative to the success of this project.

Furthermore, a collaborative and accessible distance learning gateway will provide rurally isolated community college students access to educational opportunities. These students will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in the Montana workforce of today and the future.

Montana's three community colleges are governed by locally elected boards, which set each institution's policies. In addition, the community colleges operate data management systems that differ from the MUS. The three student data collection and warehouse systems used by the community colleges are not compatible with the MUS Banner system. This initiative is crucial for the community colleges to provide the MUS with timely information in a usable format and to collaborate to provide quality student support services, which will result in enhanced distance education in Montana. Therefore, the requested funds are necessary for the community colleges to coordinate with the university system and implement OCHE's distance learning objectives.

Funds will be used to purchase security software, develop a system to report tuition and fee statements compatible with MUS distance learning gateway, develop on-line application and financial aid processes compatible with MUS distance gateway, develop on-line student support and advising system, develop learning outcomes assessment, coordinate central course management and compatibility, and develop new on-line courses in high-demand areas. As well, the following measurable objectives will be accomplished:

- a.) Increase by 10% above the fiscal year 2007 baseline, the number of students enrolled in distance learning courses toward a biennial goal of 20%.
- b.) increase by 10%, above the fiscal year 2007 baseline the number of distance learning courses and programs that are offered.

c.) increase by 10% above the fiscal year 2007, the number of new credit and noncredit distance education programs that are intended to serve primarily workers in need of career training and employers in need of specially skilled workers.

By July 2008, the Community Colleges shall report to the commissioner of higher education success in achieving the measures contained above. By August 2008, the office of the commissioner of higher education shall report to the education and local government interim committee success in achieving the measures contained above. If the measures are achieved, then the committee shall recommend to the office of budget and program planning that the \$135,000 appropriation be treated as separate funding for the community college distance learning incentive and be a part of the executive budget submitted to the 61st legislature.

Total: \$270,000